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Protective Gear for the Farmer

Personal Protective Equipment



Protective Gear for the Farmer

Personal Protective Equipment

What type of gear should a farmer wear to protect himself?

On the job he should be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). This includes hard hats or bump caps to protect the head; impact-resistant glasses, goggles, or a face shield to protect the eyes; ear muffs or fitted ear plugs to protect the ears; respirators to protect the lungs; gloves and barrier creams to protect the hands; and safety shoes to protect the feet.

PPE is not used in agriculture as widely as it is used in most other occupations. However, PPE has contributed to the safety of millions of working people in many walks of life. It can do the same for you who work in agriculture.

PPE is not expensive. Its use could prevent an injury that might be far more costly than the equipment itself . . . especially when you consider medical costs, time lost, or the cost of hiring someone to do the work while you recover.

Head Protection



Let's begin at the top. A hard hat costs little more than a good cloth cap, and a hard hat or bump cap can prevent many head injuries common in agricultural work. A plastic or fiberglass hat is a good choice for all-around farm use. It offers impact protection and resists water, burning, and electrical shock. Never wear a metal hat if there is danger of electrical contact.

Inspect headgear often. Clean it inside and out particularly after applying chemicals.

Eye Protection



Eye injuries are painful and can result in partial or total blindness. Effective eye protectors are available. Wear some type of protection when handling and applying pesticides and anhydrous ammonia, when working with power tools, when repairing machinery, when felling or trimming trees, or when doing jobs involving dust and chaff.

Protective eyewear should be carefully selected and fitted, and it should be cleaned often. Industrial-rated glasses and flexible, ventilated plastic goggles that fit over ordinary eyeglasses protect the eyes from flying particles. Chemical-splash goggles are recommended when handling or applying many agricultural chemicals.

Goggles are inexpensive. Keep a pair at each machine or in each work area where protection is needed. Remember to wear them!

Ear Protection



Noise generated by farm equipment can cause hearing losses. Long exposure to 90 or more decibels (db) is almost certain to damage hearing. Tests show that most tractors without a closed cab can produce sound levels exceeding 90 db at the ear.

There are two types of ear protectors—ear muffs and ear inserts. Ear muffs are easy to put on and take off, and they usually cost less than custom-fitted ear inserts. Inexpensive, disposable ear inserts of special formable plastic or fibrous material are also available.

Lung Protection



There's usually a lot of dust and chaff around the farm. Powerful chemicals and gases come from animal wastes.

There are three basic types of lung protectors: mechanical filter respirators, chemical cartridge respirators and gas masks, and self-contained air devices or supplied-air devices that permit fresh air to be pumped into the mask.

Mechanical filter respirators filter out or trap minute airborne particles such as dust, chaff, and most molds.

Chemical cartridge respirators and gas masks cover the nose and mouth. They have special filters that remove dust and absorb specific toxic materials. Gas masks have greater absorbing and filtering capacities than other cartridge respirators, permitting workers to stay on the job longer when handling toxic chemicals.

Self-contained or supplied-air devices are needed where oxygen is deficient or where the air is contaminated with high concentrations of toxic gases—in silos or manure pits, for example.

Chemical respirators should be approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Hand Protection



Agricultural work is hard on your hands. Using proper hand protectors can prevent skin problems and minor injuries.

Apply barrier creams to protect the skin from grease, paint, oil, and solvents when gloves are impractical.

Wear gloves to match the job. Cotton or canvas gloves are sufficient for most jobs. Wear rubber or plastic-coated gloves when working with liquids. Wear heavy leather gloves for welding or other rough work.

Don't wear gloves when working near moving parts. The gloves could get caught and pull your fingers into the machinery. Gloves aren't the whole story; hand protection also requires common sense.

Foot Protection



Well-made, properly-fitted safety shoes can be as comfortable as regular shoes. The metal toe box adds little to the cost of safety footwear and will prevent or lessen the severity of most blows to the feet.

Wear safety shoes every day but especially when doing construction work, when handling livestock, when running power mowers, when handling heavy objects, and when operating farm equipment.

PPE—personal protection equipment—will not prevent an accident, but if an accident happens, PPE can prevent an injury or make it less severe. PPE can mean the difference between being laid up for weeks or getting back on the job in a few days. It can help you cut costs. If it enables a worker to return to his job 1 or 2 days sooner, then PPE has paid for itself. It's a small investment with a large return.

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